

CITY OF RANCHO MIRAGE



A LOOK  
BACK IN TIME

*Valley Floor “The Way It Was” era mid 1950s. Courtesy of Mr. & Mrs. Marvin Odman.*

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*“Below me, these cliffs seem to range forever. There is no land more graceful, more accommodating. In this valley is seen the continuation of life; every movement that courses through these canyons has come in the footsteps of another. Every sprout and limb and tree carries the spirit of the pioneer.”*

*“One day this land will carry others upon its stony and proud back. The dusty trails that mark my dominion will be replaced by deeper, more useful paths. The silence that pervades these mountains will be replaced by the hub of human voices, making their plans and building for the future.”*



*Peninsula Bighorn sheep in the Santa Rosa Mountains. Courtesy of Bighorn Institute.*

*To the undisputed domain of the Desert Bighorn has come the joining of many visions, many ideas, many futures. Still no voice will rise above the call of our common history. Whatever achievement we herald today follows upon the footsteps of those who have walked this dusty earth before us. To lay claim to the future, we must honor the past.*

*To all who have pioneered the way for progress, to all who work to make our collective dreams of a unique and beautiful city a reality, and to all who will join us in the bright and promising future of Rancho Mirage, thank you.*

## The Discovery of Rancho Mirage

**R**ancho Mirage shares its discovery with the famed Gold Rush of the 1800's. When gold was unearthed along the banks of the Colorado River near La Paz, Arizona, prospectors and entrepreneurs hopped aboard the Bradshaw Stage Line and headed out in droves for the fabled mines of gold. This rocky route crawled through the desert along the dry belly of the Whitewater River Bed on its way to Arizona.

As news of the gold rush

spread, the area flourished. Soon the rickety wheels of the stage coach were replaced by the trusty power of the locomotive when the Southern Pacific Railroad laid tracks across the California desert in 1878. By 1915, the rutted wagon trails of the stage coach line had been completely plowed over and graded, creating the "Bradshaw Highway," later known as "**Highway 111**," the Coachella Valley's foremost roadway. 🍷

## The Eleven Mile Ranch

**T**wo frequent travelers along the new highway were Los Angeles developers R.P. "Bert" Davie and E.E. McIntyre. Rounding the corner from modern-day Cathedral City, the two men realized that they had come upon a particularly unique

location, protected from harsh desert winds and nestled serenely on the valley floor close to the river bed. Tucked away in a small cove to the right lay the pristine magnificence of Magnesia Falls Canyon, a favored site of the Cahuilla Indians.

Davie and McIntyre envisioned a colony of ranches clustered along the cove with hopes that the deep sand of

named due to its location exactly eleven miles between both Indio and Palm Springs. Everett constructed the ranch



entirely from raw materials garnered from the surrounding desert. This historic property would later become the famed “White Sun Guest Ranch,”

*Harry Taylor ranch house and land (lower center) facing Wonder Palms Road (now known as Frank Sinatra Drive). Courtesy of Richard Taylor History Collection.*

the valley would prove fertile. A quick survey of Everett Davie’s nearby Wonder Palms Date Ranch proved their hunches right, and in 1924 the two men began to purchase hundreds of acres from Southern Pacific Railroad in eighty-acre parcels.

The next year the area caught the attention of William F. Everett, who homesteaded his property and built the “Eleven Mile Ranch,” aptly

located at the eastern end of Magnesia Falls Drive.

Meanwhile, R.P. Davie returned to Los Angeles to convince his Santa Monica friends to buy parcels in his desert paradise. Though promising, Davie’s proposal had one major drawback — the wide, formidable gulch of the Whitewater River flood channel separated the cove from the Eleven Mile Ranch and the Bradshaw Highway.

Using the ingenuity that fueled his pioneer spirit, Davie gouged out a road through the deep gully using only mules and a few handmade grading tools. He named the road “Rio Del Sol,” *“Road of the Sun,”* and lined it with date palms. Across the sands, the Desert Sun newspaper heralded

the opening with banner headlines and likened Davie’s achievement to the opening of the Panama Canal.

The barriers to success overcome, Davie’s friends became the first residents of “Rancho del Sol Estates,” later known as **Clancy Lane**. 🍷

## Clancy Lane

**T**wo Los Angelinos who yearned for a simpler way of life were L.M. and Helen Clancy. The Clancys built the first Rio del Sol ranch in 1932, an adobe house made from mud gathered from the nearby wash and then dried in the sun. The Clancys set the pace for other “gentleman farmers” by planting grapefruit, dates and grapes on their ten-acre parcel and adopting a spartan lifestyle devoid of electricity, telephones and air conditioning. The new residents dug wells to supply water to the fledgling development and E.P. Nittinger, who owned

a plumbing shop in Santa Monica, donated the first irrigation pipes. Because so many ranchers hailed from Santa Monica the area acquired the nickname, “Little Santa Monica.”

The first luxury the Clancys added to their desert estate was a huge, above ground swimming pool that soon became a community attraction, drawing the likes of Jean Harlow and other notables to its cooling waters. Greta Garbo later bought a small bungalow along the date-lined street.

News of the Rio Del Sol



*Frank Morgan (Wizard of Oz) at his home on Sahara Road. One of the original Rancho Mirage homes still standing. Courtesy of Ruth Chais.*

development spread, and in 1928 the Southland Land & Realty Company bought 160 acres of Everett's land with grandiose visions of recreating the entire Nile Valley — replete with tents, camels and pyramids. However, the ensuing stock market crash of 1929 altered those plans, and the land lay undeveloped for

the next six years.

Despite the Depression, news of the secluded desert oasis rushed through Hollywood like wildfire. Frank Morgan, the beloved “*Wizard of Oz*,” and Louis “Mac” Blankenhorn, developer of Smoke Tree Ranch, each bought homes in private Magnesia Falls Cove in the early thirties. 🍷

## Dr. Tarr's Asthmatic Clinic

**I**n 1934, a new type of development took place in the small community. Dr. Earl Tarr, a Los Angeles pediatrician, made plans to move his school for asthmatic children from a small site in Cathedral City to nearby

Eleven Mile Ranch. The move and expansion were to be financed by Tarr's friend, Will Rogers, who generously pledged \$200,000 to the school. The new site called for eight teachers and accommodations for 18 children between the

ages of five and fourteen.

However, the tragic plane crash that ended Rogers' life nearly ruined the school as well.

Were it not for the dedication of a group of Rogers' friends, including Roz Russell, Mike Romanoff, Basil Rathbone, Mary Pickford, Norma Shearer and Tom Mix, the school would have closed due to lack of funds. The school operated successfully until World War II depleted the teaching staff.

Later in 1934 Louis Blankenhorn invited his sales manager, Laurence Macomber, to look at a beautiful cove east of Palm Springs with plans of a new subdivision in mind. Deciding the area was perfect, the company set up a sales office at the mouth of Magnesia Falls Canyon. This industrious group would soon become the new leaders of the little cove community. 🍷

## The Naming of Rancho Mirage

As time progresses and memories fade the history of Rancho Mirage has combined fact with hearsay. Some stories attribute the name to John Talbert, a salesman under Laurence Macomber, who was said to have named Rancho Mirage and many of its streets. Other sources say that Macomber, a Scot, coined the area "Rancho Mirage" by combining French

and Spanish idioms.

Yet another account credits the naming to Ruth Wheeler (later Mrs. Louis Blankenhorn). Enjoying a picnic in the Magnesia Falls Canyon in April, 1934, Wheeler was said to have commented that the misty green of Rio Del Sol in the distance resembled a "mirage." Macomber and Blankenhorn reportedly liked the name, but decided to add

“Rancho” for sales appeal.

The enthusiasm generated by Blankenhorn and his salespeople drew another colorful character to the troupe — an enterprising Canadian by the name of Don Cameron. This one-man sales force would become known as “Mr. Rancho Mirage.” Cameron helped Macomber lay the first pipeline for the new city-to-be and went to work vigorously promoting the area. In 1934 the Rancho Mirage Community Association was officially recorded in Sacramento, as the seeds of community had begun to take root.

The next ten years brought a sense of unity to the fledgling village. In 1936, flying and sporting enthusiast E.L. “Hank” Gogerty bought 300 acres of property on the other side of Rio Del Sol and built “Rancho Hankaru,” which would later become **Eisenhower Medical Center**. The original Davie ranch was sold to E.J. Ewart, a Los Angeles realtor, who would subsequently sell it to

the developers of Sunrise Country Club.

By now Rancho Mirage had outgrown its rural beginnings. Cameron first persuaded postal authorities to give Rancho Mirage a postal stop of its own, then went to work constructing a makeshift row of mail boxes. Behind them he built a two-room clapboard structure with log seats for shade and conversation. Next to the mailboxes he posted a wooden plaque listing the names of the initial box holders.

San Geronio Street resident Marge Anderson, one of the founders of the Rancho Mirage Women’s Club, remembers how “Mail Box Row” created a sense of unity in an area where most homes were dozens of acres apart. “We would all meet at the mail box every day and socialize,” she recalls. “In the winters we’d have bonfires and everyone would sit around and talk about things. We made a lot of plans around that post office.”

However, the easy allegiances formed in Rancho Mirage were not echoed in the rest of world and the United States involvement in World War II began in 1941. Instead

of building new homes, several Magnesia Falls residents were forced to house General Patton's troops while waiting for the war to end. 🍷

*Double tier of mail boxes — the first post office in Rancho Mirage (1937).*

*Photo by Gail B. Thompson.*



## The Post-War Boom

Anticipating a post-war surge in development, in 1945 “Hank” Gogerty realized an ambition and opened “Mirage Park,” an airstrip which he leased as a flying school. The next year Gogerty completed his dream and opened the Desert Air Hotel, the desert’s first fly-in

hotel and airport on what is currently the site of the Rancho Las Palmas. In addition, Gogerty offered hotel patrons the game of the elite and installed a polo field adjacent to the runway.

“Desert Air” soon became the social heart of the community, hosting gala parties

*Desert Air Hotel and Polo Field (1956). The desert's first fly in hotel, currently Rancho Las Palmas Country Club. Courtesy of the City of Rancho Mirage.*

and providing a steady stream of happenings for Clancy Lane residents to view from their backyards. “Frank Sinatra used to come in real low and give everyone a thrill,” recalls Lady Mary Davis, who lived nearby. “He was a bit of a daredevil and enjoyed flying over the housetops as low as he could.”

New York businessman Jack Dengler, who had a passion for the Old West. He purchased the Eleven Mile Ranch in 1946 with designs to make it an authentic dude ranch he would name “The White Sun Guest Ranch.”

“It was ghastly in the beginning — just awful,” laughs Helen Dengler, a Julliard-

trained student who abandoned a musical career and followed her husband to the desert with five children in tow.



Even the food at Desert Air Hotel was legendary. Members of the American Pilots Association were known to fly in just for a piece of Gogerty’s special apple pie, and it was not uncommon for diners to fly in for an evening meal.

News of the exciting developments taking place in Rancho Mirage reached

“Jack was always coming up with a lollapalooza, so he knew he had to find a way to make it wonderful. Getting a toilet was a major victory in those days. Then we added two sinks that didn’t match. Gradually we built the place up until it was really the star of its day. Johnny Boyle would sing around the outdoor fireplace on Saturday nights, and we’d



have authentic chuck wagon breakfasts every Sunday morning.”

The White Sun Guest Ranch became internationally known, and blossomed from hosting a dozen guests to nearly 200 in its heyday. Each room featured the artistic touches of True Slocum, who taught guests how to make

“woodscapes,” three-dimensional sculptures of desert animals fashioned from ironwood gathered on jeep and horseback rides. Numerous celebrities frequented the ranch, including Yul Brynner, who won popularity for his habit of eating breakfast with the staff each morning before his daily ride. 🐾

*Desert Air  
Hotel and  
Air Field  
(1956).  
Courtesy  
of the City  
of Rancho  
Mirage.*

## Ronald Button Period

Hollywood drew yet another pioneer to the Rancho Mirage midst. Hollywood lawyer Ronald Button and Dave Culver, an investor friend, bought 1,920

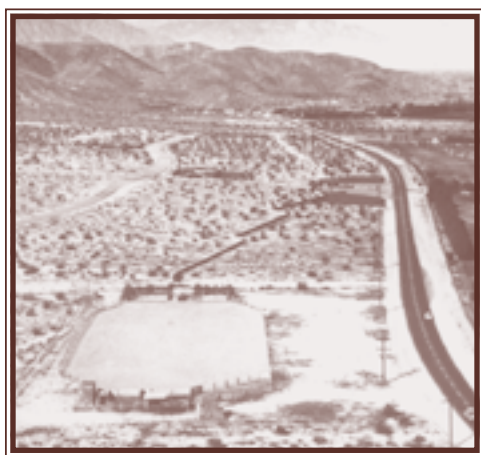
acres, including the original Davie subdivision which had now grown thick with citrus, dates, grapes and alfalfa crops.

Button’s dream was to offer a more affordable and

“civilized” aspect to the young community. One of his most successful ventures was a 425 home subdivision in the Magnesia Falls Cove, the area’s

second settlement. As these homes quickly sold, the population center shifted both south and west of the original Rio Del Sol ranches. 🍷

## Country Club Development



*Thunderbird  
and roping  
arena now  
known as  
Thunderbird  
Heights  
(Early-50s).  
Courtesy  
of Frank  
Bogert.*

The Thunderbird Ranch, a dude ranch operation, was developed in the mid-40s with the concept of selling lots on adjoining land. The ranch operated until it was realized that golfers and caddies were rapidly replacing cowboys and ranch hands.

About that time, respected amateur golfer Johnny Dawson became intrigued with the idea of creating a local championship

course while playing the nine-hole O'Donnell course in Palm Springs. He began an in-depth survey of the land, taking into consideration the factors of soil, water, wind, sun, view and drainage. Extensive geologic testing proved the desert sand could support greens by adding a few minerals and certain fertilizers.

His decision reached, Dawson began to search for an appropriate site. Flying over the desert floor, he studied wind patterns in the sand to see where gusts would be too harsh and discovered that the protective shield of the Santa Rosas mitigated much of the wind problem. Land prices in Palm Springs had become prohibitive, so Dawson narrowed his focus to sites in

the eastern valley.

Hearing of their plans, Frank Bogert, Thunderbird Dude Ranch manager, suggested that the ranch would be the perfect site. Dawson agreed and together with Tony Burke, Barney Hinkle and Frank Bogert, began to solicit investments from corporate stockholders around the country. In a short time Thunderbird Country Club, with the desert's first 18 hole golf course, was a reality and a legend was born. Bogert was the club manager and Dawson served as club president.

Corporate memberships were created and Ambassador Leonard Firestone, Milt Hicks and Reuben Fleet were among the first buyers. Hollywood couples Phil Harris and Alice Faye, Desi Arnaz and Lucille Ball were among the first to build homes around the prestigious golf course, followed by avid golfers Bob Hope and Bing Crosby. Later, the Ford Motor Company would name one of its most prestigious automobiles



after the exclusive club.

Thunderbird came to be synonymous with the glamour, style and opulence that characterized Hollywood. Art benefactor Kay Obergfel remembers seeing Lucy cut up at the ladies' golfing parties: "We'd be sitting around, playing cards and talking, and Lucy'd come in. She didn't play golf, but she enjoyed hanging out with the girls. Pretty soon everything would stop because she'd start doing something funny. She was hysterical, a natural born

*Lucille Ball  
and  
Desi Arnaz  
at their  
Thunderbird  
home  
(Early-50s).  
Courtesy of  
Thunderbird  
Country  
Club.*

comedienne.” Lucy went on to become the first Honorary Mayor of Rancho Mirage, followed by neighbor Phil Harris.



*Frank Sinatra and Scorpi Doyle at Tamarisk Country Club (Early-50s). Courtesy of Scorpi Doyle.*

Parties at Thunderbird were as legendary as its membership. The Club served as a haven for celebrities such as Edgar Bergen, Ray Bolger, Hoagy Carmichael, Perry Como, Billie Dove, Alex Dreier, Clark Gable, Ben Hogan, Bob Kennison, Gordon and

Sheila MacCrae, Randolph Scott and Esther Williams, among many others.

Country club living had caught fire in Rancho Mirage, and the area would never turn back. Tamarisk Country Club made its debut in 1952 and signed noted golfer Ben Hogan on as the club pro. Tamarisk had an impressive membership roster from the start, including the famed Marx Brothers, who became lead players in the club’s development. Frank Sinatra built his home on Tamarisk during its early stages. Other notables who played the course or became members were President Eisenhower, Jack Benny, Sammy Davis Jr., Danny Kaye, and Dean Martin, among many others. Phil Regan an early Tamarisk homeowner hosted President Truman, the first president to visit Rancho Mirage.

These clubs were followed by Desert Island, which erected its first high-rise building in 1972. Since then, Rancho Mirage has been dubbed

“country club city,” with approximately seventy percent of its population seeking the haven and community of country club living. The city proudly boasts some of the finest golf and country clubs in the desert. After Thunderbird, Tamarisk and Desert Island were developed along came The Springs, Sunrise, Mission Hills, Rancho Las Palmas, Rancho Mirage and Morningside. Rancho Mirage helped to host the original Palm Springs Golf Classic in 1960. Two of the four clubs participating in the first tournament were Thunderbird and Tamarisk. Today the annual golf event is known world over as the Bob Hope Chrysler Classic and is played at various desert courses with Tamarisk continuing as a participating club. The Nabisco-Dinah Shore, Ladies Professional Golf Tournament, is played every spring at Mission Hills Country Club which was developed on Agua Caliente Indian land.

The allure and prestige of



Rancho Mirage clubs continues to be a draw for dignitaries, luminaries and celebrities.

Rancho Mirage has hosted several United States Presidents, including Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Nixon, Ford, Reagan, Bush and Clinton, and numerous foreign ambassadors and government officials.

Former President Gerald and Betty Ford, made Rancho Mirage their home in the seventies. The area has truly earned the moniker “*the Playground of Presidents.*”

*Dinah Shore at the Nabisco-Dinah Shore Pro-Am at Mission Hills Country Club. (Spring 1987). Courtesy of Palm Springs Life.*

More glitter came to Rancho Mirage when Bing Crosby founded Blue Skies Village Mobile Home Park in 1953. Crosby named the mobile home park after his hit song, "Blue Skies." Interior streets were named

after Hollywood celebrities and include Jack Benny, Burns and Allen, Bing Crosby, Claudette Colbert, Greer Garson, Danny Kaye and Barbara Stanwyck Roads. Today Rancho Mirage is home to six mobile home communities. 🍷

## The Annenberg Estate



*Ambassador and Mrs. Walter Annenberg at "Sunnylands". Courtesy of Ambassador Annenberg.*

The man who would play host to the world's leaders also chose to call Rancho Mirage home. Ambassador Walter Annenberg had spent a month relaxing in the desert in 1950 when the mountains around Rancho Mirage caught

his eye. He eventually decided the area was perfect for a golf course, and in 1961 began construction of a 32,000 square foot main house and guest quarters on over 200 acres of land at the corner of Wonder Palms Road and Rio Del Sol, now known as Frank Sinatra and Bob Hope Drives.

As it turned out, the land chosen by Annenberg had regal origins. It was officially discovered by King Carlos V of Spain in 1542 when the California area was under Spanish dominion and was called "Alta California." The name "Sunnylands" was chosen by Ambassador Walter Annenberg because that name had been used by his parents

for previously owned vacation property and also because it was an appropriate name based on the desert's remarkably good weather. Annenberg's guest list often reads as impressive as Sunnylands' history. Ambassador and Mrs. Annenberg have hosted many dignitaries which included Queen Elizabeth, Prince Philip, Princess Margaret, Prince Charles, Prince Andrew,

Presidents Eisenhower, Nixon, Reagan, Bush and Clinton, along with many distinguished others.

Incidentally, the Ambassador's golf course is truly extraordinary. Utilizing a complex series of design elements, the course spans approximately 6,000 yards and is comprised of nine holes playable as eighteen by using two different tees per hole. 🍷

## The Wheels of Progress



*President Eisenhower with Jack Nicklaus and Arnold Palmer (1969). Courtesy of EMC.*

While the famous happily played on manicured courses, the founding fathers of Rancho Mirage struggled to carve an appropriate path for the progress that had overtaken their little village.

With the surge in population had come traffic problems, and Don Cameron and other ranchers convinced the County to extend Rio Del Sol down to the transcontinental highway. The new road was officially

opened in 1950 amid much fanfare. Shortly thereafter Avenue Forty was extended to Rio Del Sol and east to Washington Street. The new street was aptly named, **“Country Club Drive.”**

Full-time residents bring full-time needs, and in 1955 Duncan Emmons opened his automobile repair shop along the Highway 111 corridor, which still operates today along with Dr. Jackson’s veterinary clinic which opened in 1960. Supermarkets and restaurants followed, beginning with Lord Fletcher’s and eventually leading to “Restaurant Row,” the foremost dining strip in the desert. Later Rancho Mirage would become home to the Chart House, whose award-winning design rises only 12 feet above ground, giving diners a soothing subterranean ambiance.

In 1961 Bob Hope bought the entire 300-acre Rancho Hankaru from Hank Gogerty.

The following years brought a resurgence of interest

in the Chamber of Commerce, which launched a number of projects that year, including the creation of the Rancho Mirage Women’s Club in 1963. Later that year the Chamber erected a permanent bronze plaque display near the post office on “Memory Lane,” commemorating the early settlers.

In 1966, Rancho Mirage launched its first community newspaper, jointly published by the Chamber of Commerce, the Women’s Club and the Rancho Mirage Community Association. The “Rancho Mirage Reporter” emphasized the need for the residents of Rancho Mirage to “voice their own opinions,” since they opposed being represented by the larger entities of Palm Springs, Palm Desert and Indio. A copy was mailed to every residence in Rancho Mirage. That tradition continues today in the form of the “Miragescape,” the city’s newsletter. 🍷



## Eisenhower Medical Center

With a full-time population of around 500 and a seasonal population at least three times that, in the late sixties Rancho Mirage had become a viable community with restaurants, hotels, golf courses, supermarkets and other businesses. Every need seemed to be attended to, yet the mid-valley had no medical facilities.

In 1966, Bob Hope generously donated 80 acres of his land on Rio Del Sol for the proposed five million dollar medical center. Meanwhile,

Dolores Hope worked unceasingly to promote and garner private funds for the hospital.

Former President Dwight D. Eisenhower consented to have the new facility named after him while visiting the area in the mid-sixties. In 1971, the 138-bed, multimillion-dollar medical center was dedicated before a crowd of 15,000. Officiating at the ceremonies; then-President Richard Nixon, Vice-President Spirow Agnew, Mamie Eisenhower and then-California

*Eisenhower  
Medical  
Center.  
Construction  
of hospital  
begins  
March 1970.  
Courtesy  
of EMC.*

Governor Ronald Reagan.

Since its inception Eisenhower Medical Center has continued to provide “five-star” service to the entire desert region and has earned worldwide respect. Later additions to the center include the Probst,

Kiewit and Wright professional buildings, the Annenberg Center, the Betty Ford Center, the Hal B. Wallis Research Facility, the Barbara Sinatra Children’s Center and the Dolores Hope Outpatient Care Center, among important others. 🍷

## Rancho Mirage Elementary School

**I**n 1967, Rancho Mirage Elementary School opened in the north end of Magnesia Falls Cove. Previously the children attended classes in Palm Springs and Indio. The curriculum offered an “open learning environment” in which children could learn at their own pace. The school received widespread attention, though not all supportive, for its eclectic approach to education.

Three years later the Whitewater Storm Channel was bridged, using only private funds. To honor Bob Hope, Rio Del Sol, the area’s chief byway, became “Bob Hope Drive.” Continuing to recognize the celebrities that have called Rancho Mirage home, the city has named thoroughfares to honor President Gerald Ford, Ginger Rogers, Dinah Shore and Frank Sinatra. 🍷

## The Drive for Incorporation

**B**y this time, Rancho Mirage had caught the eye of more than a few

important people as an up-and-coming town with a number of enviable assets.

Palm Desert had its eye on Rancho Mirage, and had earlier tried unsuccessfully to annex Eisenhower Medical Center in its first incorporation drive in the late sixties.

However, nothing incensed the early settlers of Rancho Mirage more than Palm Desert's proposed intrusion into their sacred land, Clancy Lane. A call to arms was issued, and the people of Rancho Mirage responded in droves. To ward off the advances of other cities, Rancho Mirage would have to learn to govern itself.

Lloyd Tevis, a retired biologist, had lived on Clancy Lane for many years and was desperate to preserve its rural lifestyle. He and Roy Hudson, a longtime desert resident, met in the living room of Hudson's Sahara Drive home and talked about incorporation. "We didn't have the slightest idea what we were doing," Tevis remembers of the pre-incorporation days. "We were just desperate to stop

Palm Desert or Cathedral City from taking us over."

A general election was held to determine the will of the people. When the polls were tallied, more than 85 percent of Rancho Mirage residents favored incorporation, and on August 3, 1973, Rancho Mirage was officially declared the 16th city in Riverside County and one of the wealthiest cities per capita in the United States.

The citizens of Rancho Mirage elected Leonard Krieger, Harold Pirret, William J. Rawitzer, Lloyd Tevis and Edna Warner to the first City Council. Rawitzer was elected the first Mayor of Rancho Mirage and William Probert, an expert in new city management, was named to the post of City Manager.

Rawitzer remembers those early days with fondness and humility. "It was quite a triumph, really. We worked very, very hard to make this city a reality and we were relieved to hear it had come



*Eisenhower Medical Center (lower left), Springs Country Club under construction, Desert Island Country Club (center) and Annenberg's "Sunnylands" (upper far right). (Early-70s). Courtesy of EMC.*

through. Of course after the relief came more hard work, but it was all worth it.”

Edna Warner spied the abandoned office at the corner of Frank Sinatra and Highway 111, and thought it would be perfect for city offices. Keeping its focus on excellence, the new city council moved into the unique Sky Mountain real estate office at Edna Warner’s suggestion. Today the original building and its expanded twin comprise modern-day City Hall.

The city’s leaders set to work creating a General Plan that would ensure that Rancho Mirage would continue to strive for excellence in all its endeavors, coining itself as “the jewel of the desert.” The Council created an underground utility district, determined not to let the sight of electric poles disturb the visual landscape. In 1976 the city opened its first fire station on Highway 111 across from Thunderbird Country Club. 🍷

## Direction for the Future

The city made moves toward both progress and preservation of its heritage throughout the next decade. In 1981 Whitewater Park opened followed by Wolfson Park, the only Coachella Valley park equipped with a trail system which includes bronze braille reading plaques. Rancho Mirage residents Frank Sinatra and Dinah Shore scripted an audio presentation which can be heard electronically at each rest area along the trail.

Adhering to its equestrian roots, in 1982 the city created a Trails Committee to preserve a 20-mile horse trail system, and later published a Guide to hiking, biking and riding trails throughout the Coachella Valley. To prevent disastrous flooding as was suffered prior to incorporation, the city worked painstakingly to implement flood control measures in strategic areas. Magnesia Falls was one of the first areas that had been historically devastated

by floods. In 1985 the city began its extensive 4.7 million dollar flood control project with redevelopment funds. Later the city created a Bighorn Sheep Preserve high in the hills above Rancho Mirage. The Braille Institute in Rancho Mirage, which provides all facets of assistance to the visually impaired, is considered unique in the nation as it was architecturally designed and constructed specifically to accommodate its clientele. The Children's Museum of the Desert also chose to make Rancho Mirage its permanent home.

In the nineties, Rancho Mirage is a city with a reputation all its own. The first crops of dates and citrus sprouted seeds of invention which have matured into a city characterized by the tenacious pride and elegant charm of its people.

Many reminders of Rancho Mirage's origins have disappeared in the path of progress. The tiny post office,



*Peninsula  
Bighorn ewe  
and lamb.  
Courtesy  
of Bighorn  
Institute.*

which once housed a scant dozen mailboxes, has been replaced by a new building more than three times its size and is now located at The River, an outdoor dining, shopping and entertainment complex. The western appeal of White Sun Guest Ranch and Desert Air Hotel have been replaced by the modern conveniences of Rancho Las Palmas Resort & Spa, The Ritz-Carlton, and The Westin Mission Hills Resort & Spa.

However,  
one symbol  
of the past  
remains. High  
above city hall,  
far removed  
from the hum  
of traffic along  
Highway 111,  
one resident  
bighorn peace-  
fully munches  
on a lunch of  
encelia, sweet  
bush and burro  
bush and pauses  
for a long,

cooling sip from the oasis  
created just for her.

Thanks to the completion  
in 2003 of the city's Bighorn  
Safety Fence, a five-mile  
long wildlife barrier in the  
mountains to separate the  
endangered Peninsular Bighorn  
Sheep from Rancho Mirage  
urban areas, she remains safe  
tucked away in the hills. Come  
nightfall she will relax, look  
out upon the valley and be  
thankful for the little cove  
that she calls home. 🐏

*NOTE: The 1993 edition of this booklet was awarded the Desert Addy by the Desert Advertising Club.*

*The information contained in this booklet was obtained from a variety of sources; newspaper articles, previous written accounts by residents, and personal interviews. Prior to incorporation, the area was without a historian and documented records are scant. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this document, certain omissions and/or errors may occur. The City and the writers shall have no responsibility for any errors.*



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